

Impending CIA bloodletting?

It would be easier to evaluate the partially "confirmed" rumor that Richard M. Helms is about to bow to pressure to resign as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency if one were able to get some kind of fix on the CIA itself. The virtually impenetrable secrecy that surrounds every phase of CIA activities, however, reduces one to an evaluation of such extraneous but relevant facts as are available, and there is no excess of comfort in any of these.

It is disconcerting to learn, for example, that the background of Mr. Helms's dissatisfaction (or president Nixon's dissatisfaction with him) includes disputes with both Henry Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's foreign policy adviser, and Melvin Laird, the retiring Secretary of Defense.

Mr. Laird's quarrel with Mr. Helms reportedly stems from their disagreement in 1969 when Mr. Laird insisted that the Soviets were maneuvering to attain a "first-strike capability" against the US and Mr. Helms insisted that Moscow had in no way shifted from its traditional emphasis on defense. That we are all still here may not prove conclusively that Mr. Laird was wrong and Mr. Helms was right, but we ARE still here.

His dispute with Mr. Kissinger, or vice versa, was predictable a year ago when Mr. Nixon set up an intelligence committee within the National Security Council and made Mr. Kissinger its head. Whether Mr. Nixon is perhaps giving Mr. Kissinger too much authority and is spreading him too thin would be a subjective judgment incapable, for now at least, of objective proof.

But the reputed Kissinger objection that Mr. Helms "was not supporting the Administration" in committee councils raises an interesting question. The CIA director's chief function, one would think, is not to

support the Administration or Dr. Kissinger either when the facts as he knows them dictate otherwise. His job is to let the facts fall where they may.

Mr. Nixon spoke highly of Mr. Helms just a year ago when he announced that Mr. Helms would assume "enhanced leadership" in planning, reviewing, coordinating and evaluating all intelligence programs and activities. By most estimates, he had earned the accolade.

For one thing, he had both the wisdom and the courage to oppose the CIA's disastrous attempt to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, opposing not only the then CIA hierarchy but also the admirals and generals in the Pentagon. President Kennedy thereafter was as leery of Pentagon counsel as Mr. Helms had been. "If it wasn't for the Bay of Pigs, I might have sent Marines into Laos in 1961, as a lot of people around here wanted me to do."

Mr. Helms showed his perspicacity also in 1967 when Air Force intelligence insisted that bombing would bring North Vietnam to its knees, and Mr. Helms said that it would unite the North Vietnamese and firm up their resolve to fight to the death if necessary. Lyndon Johnson could have saved his Presidency and the war could have been ended long ago if the White House had listened to the facts of the situation rather than the politics of it.

One does not lightly endorse a secret police agency even when, as in the case of the CIA under Mr. Helms, "we do not target on American citizens." But so long as super-spies are one of the facts of international life, one rests somewhat more comfortably when the top spy, so far as one is able to judge, is competent and conscientious and sticks to the hard facts without bending to political winds.

STATINTL

Topless Secrets: A Political Fad

A few U.S. senators and their journalistic allies have renewed a heavy-handed attempt to force the secrecy and subtlety of the Central Intelligence Agency under the thumb of Congress.

Critics of U.S. foreign policy, in Indochina and elsewhere, are especially eager to call the CIA to account and thus by asserting accountability to restore what is commonly referred to as the usurped "congressional responsibility in the making of foreign policy."

The erroneous implication is that Congress is primarily responsible for the formulation of foreign policy, whereas Congress is only one source of authority in relations with other nations and in national security affairs. Senators Cooper, Case and McGovern want the real fount of foreign policy — the Executive Branch — brought under much closer congressional control and influence, which is impracticable and improbable.

The CIA makes a convenient scapegoat, especially for those who disagree with the foreign policies of the incumbent administration and even

more especially for those who fail to understand the functions (and limitations) of the CIA as an adjunct of the National Security Council, responsible directly to the President.

Undue secrecy in government is deplorable, but it does not follow that there must be no secrets or that the intelligence garnered by the CIA must be shared with 535 members of Congress. Some congressional oversight of the functions of the intelligence community, of which the CIA is only one member, is desirable and in fact it is now and has for years been exercised at the President's discretion through ranking congressional leaders.

But where congressional oversight ends and congressional control begins is a moot point. Congress in the past has wisely recognized the restrictions its sheer size and the scope of its concerns impose on its dealings in day-by-day international affairs. It has, therefore, given the Executive Branch the tools with which to exercise the President's pre-eminent constitutional authority in foreign affairs, the mechanics of which involve the very security of the United States.